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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2081
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 2787
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 5351
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0391
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0499
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2019
TAGS: [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: SITREP ON SAUDI MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE
HOUTHIS, DECEMBER 16, 2009

REF: A. SANAA 2117
[1](#)B. RIYADH 1558
[1](#)C. RIYADH 1570
[1](#)D. RIYADH 1547

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Susan Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (A), (B)
AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Articles in the international and Yemeni press carried conflicting accounts of bombing attacks in northern Yemen in recent days. Reuters ran a story on December 16 quoting Houthi claims that the U.S. Air Force conducted a raid on Tuesday in northern Yemen that resulted in 120 Yemeni deaths. The same Reuters story carried another Houthi-sourced report that Saudi Arabian fighters had bombed the village of Razez earlier in the week causing 70 fatalities. There has been no official Saudi statement in response to these reports. End Summary.

CASUALTIES MOUNTING THOUGH NUMBERS UNCLEAR

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The outlandish Houthi insistence that the U.S. Air Force conducted bombing raids over Yemen provides a reminder of how difficult it is to obtain credible information about the fighting in northern Yemen. However, the Yemeni military's announcement (Yemen Observer, December 15) that Yemeni aircraft -- not Saudi -- bombed Razez on Sunday gives credence that a significant attack occurred there. Reports of the number of Yemenis killed in that attack range from 30 to 70. The Saudi Air Force Commander informed DAO earlier today that Saudi aircraft are operating in Yemeni airspace, with approval from the Yemeni Government to target any locations that the Saudis deem necessary.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Embassy DAO sources have also suggested that Saudi casualties are significantly higher than is being reported in the Saudi press. Official Saudi sources have reported about 20 deaths of Saudi soldiers. DAO sources have noted that additional military medical personnel have recently relocated to the Najran area. One contact reported seeing as many as 60 body bags being offloaded at a military airport in Tabuk. The same source said that 127 Saudi soldiers have died in the fighting, and about 200 have been wounded. (The Embassy has not been able to independently corroborate this information.) The Embassy has also been hearing reports that Saudi

aircraft have been responsible for numerous instances of fratricide and friendly forces (Yemeni military) deaths; U.S. defense contractors have heard similar reports.

SOLID GCC SUPPORT

14. (C) The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit concluded yesterday in Bahrain with an official affirmation that the GCC supports Saudi actions "against the cross-border assaults launched by armed infiltrators against the Saudi territories." The GCC also agreed to create a joint rapid reaction force that "would intervene in situations similar to an incursion into Saudi Arabia by the Yemeni infiltrators." The GCC announcement did not, however, indicate any plans to deploy the force to Saudi Arabia.

FENCING OUT THE HOUTHIS

15. (C) Saudi military sources have also announced an urgent project by the Saudi Land Forces to put in place a barbed wire fence along "most" of the 1,600 kilometer Saudi-Yemeni border. (Embassy note: This project will apparently go forward in advance of \$1.2 billion project awarded to EADS to erect a border fence equipped with electronic sensors. Assistant Minister of Interior Mohammed bin Nayef mentioned to Ambassador Smith last October that the EADS project would commence work "soon after the Hajj." End note)
ZIADEH